

TIMAEUS

Socrates, Timaeus, Hermocrates, Critias

- 17A **Socrates:** One, two, three ... but now where's our fourth, my dear Timaeus, of yesterday's feasters and hosts of today?
- Timaeus:** Some illness befell him, Socrates—he wouldn't have been left out of this meeting willingly.
- Socrates:** Then does the task of filling the missing one's part belong to you and these fellows here?
- B **Timaeus:** It certainly does, and we'll do everything in our power, at least, not to fall short in any way. Besides, it wouldn't be at all just for those of us who are left, after being entertained by you yesterday with gifts so befitting to guests, not to host you heartily in return.
- Socrates:** So then, I take it you remember what I ordered—how many things you were to speak of and about what?
- Timaeus:** Some of it we remember; and as for what we don't, you're here to remind us—or rather, unless there's some difficulty for you, go through it again briefly from the beginning, just to make it more secure for us.
- C **Socrates:** So be it. I suppose the chief part of the speeches recounted by me yesterday was about what sort of regime, as it appeared to me, would come to be best and of what sort of men it would be made.
- Timaeus:** And to be sure, Socrates, the regime you recounted was very much to the mind of us all.
- Socrates:** So then, as for the class of those who till the earth, and all the other arts in the regime, didn't we first off distinguish them as separate from the class of those who were to make war on the city's behalf?
- Timaeus:** Yes.
- D **Socrates:** And when, exactly in accordance with nature, we gave to each man the one sole occupation that was suited to his very self—one art to each—we said that those who had to make war on behalf of all, and they alone, had to be the guardians of the city, if anyone from the outside
- 18A or even of those within might set out to do her harm; and that they'd

be gentle in dealing out justice to the people ruled by them, since they were by nature friends, but would become harsh in their battles against the enemies they happened to run into.

Timaeus: That's altogether so.

Socrates: For I think we were saying that the soul of the guardians had to be of a certain nature—spirited but at the same time philosophic, in the highest degree—so that they'd be able to become correctly gentle, and harsh, toward the people we mentioned.

Timaeus: Yes.

Socrates: And what about their upbringing? Weren't we saying that they'd been brought up on lessons in both gymnastics and music, in all things, in short, that were appropriate to these men?

Timaeus: Of course.

- B **Socrates:** And I suppose it was said that those brought up this way must never regard either gold or silver or anything else as their own private property. On the contrary, they must regard themselves as auxiliaries who take from those kept safe and sound by them a temperate wage for moderate men; and, in fact, they're to spend it in common and live as companions with each another, continually exercising a care for virtue and staying at leisure from all other occupations.

Timaeus: That too was said, and in just that way.

- C **Socrates:** Furthermore, regarding women, we mentioned that their natures were to be tuned to the men and so made similar to them, and that to all the women all occupations were to be given in common, those pertaining to war as well as to the rest of life's regimen.

Timaeus: That's just the way that too was said.

- D **Socrates:** Well, and what about the part that had to do with child-production? Or is that easy to remember because of the unusualness of what was said? We set it down, did we not, that regarding marriages and children all would be in common with all; and we contrived it so that no one might ever recognize his own private progeny, and all will regard all as their very kinsmen—as sisters and brothers if these happened to be within an age that fit their own, but as parents and grandparents if they came before and were upwards in age, and as their own offspring and descendants of their offspring if these were children and lower down in age?

Timaeus: Yes, and that's easy to remember, just as you say.

Socrates: And indeed, in order that they might become, to the best of our power, as good as possible in their natures right from the start, don't we remember how we said that the rulers, male and female, had to contrive some sort of lottery by secret ballots for marital coupling so that the

- E separate classes of bad and good men will respectively be mated by lot with women who were like them; and that no hatred would arise among them on this score since they'd believe that the cause of the allotment was chance?

Timaeus: We do remember.

- 19A **Socrates:** And what's more, do we remember how we said that the offspring of the good were to be brought up, but the offspring of the bad were to be handed over in secret to the rest of the city? And as those offspring were growing up, the rulers always had to keep a sharp lookout for the worthy ones among them and bring them back again to their former place, and move the ones among themselves who were unworthy into the place of those who went back?

Timaeus: That's what we said.

Socrates: Well then, have we by now gone through things exactly as they were said yesterday so as to go back again over the chief points? Or are we still yearning for something further in what was said, my dear Timaeus, something that's being left out?

- B **Timaeus:** Not at all. On the contrary, these were the very things that were said, Socrates.¹

- Socrates:** Now then, hear, if you would, what comes next regarding the regime we went through—how I happen to be affected by it. My affection seems to be something like this: it's as if someone who gazed upon beautiful animals somewhere, either produced by the art of painting or truly living but keeping their peace, were to get a desire to gaze upon them moving and contending in some struggle that seemed appropriate to their bodies. I too am affected in the same way toward the city we went through. For with pleasure would I hear someone giving a full account of her struggling against other cities in those contests in which cities contend—how she made a fitting entrance into war and rendered appropriate payment to her education and upbringing in her dealings with each of the cities, by the way she acted in her deeds and negotiated in her speeches. Now,
- C on this point, Critias and Hermocrates, I myself have accused myself of never becoming capable of praising our men and our city adequately. Of course there's nothing wondrous in this inability of mine, but I've gotten hold of the same opinion about the poets, those born long ago as well as
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¹ Socrates has in fact given a highly incomplete summary of the best city in the *Republic*. He leaves out the concern for the proper ordering of the individual soul; the need for philosopher kings; the mathematical education that paves the way for dialectic; and the eventual degeneration of the just city. He also leaves out the whole problem of defining justice and determining whether the possession of justice makes us happy.

- the ones that are around now; not that I dishonor the poetic class, but it's plain to everyone that the imitative tribe will imitate easiest and best what it's been brought up on, and it's difficult for them individually to
- E be good at imitating what arises outside their upbringing—difficult in deeds and still more difficult in speeches. And as for the sophistic class in its turn, I believe them to be highly experienced in many and beautiful speeches on other matters; but I fear that somehow or other, since the members of this class wander from city to city and haven't settled down anywhere in their own private dwellings, the class would stray from the mark in describing how men at once philosophers and statesmen might act and speak when, in war and battles, they acted in deed and engaged each adversary in speech. What's been left is the class in *your* condition,
- 20A the class that by nature and upbringing partakes of both at once. For Timaeus here—being from Italian Locri, a city with excellent laws,² and yielding to no one in those parts in substance and class—has managed the greatest offices and positions of honor in his city and, moreover, has in my opinion reached the very peak of all philosophy; and as for Critias, I suppose all of us in these parts know that he's a layman in none of the things we're talking about. And again, regarding Hermocrates' nature and upbringing, one must trust the many people who testify to their
- B adequacy in all these matters. That's why even yesterday, bearing all this in mind, I gratified you heartily when you obliged me to go through matters of regime, since I knew that none would more adequately than you render the account next in order (that is, if you were willing); for by establishing all things appropriate to the city, you would render her engaged in a fitting war—you alone of those now living—and so, having spoken what was ordered, I ordered you in return to take up what I'm describing even now. Then, after you had looked over it in common among yourselves, you agreed to pay me back today with my guest-gift
- C of speeches; so here I am—arrayed for the occasion and readiest of all men to do my receiving.³

² See *Laws* 638B. According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Epizephorian or western Locri, a city in the toe of Italy, “possessed Europe’s earliest written legal code (attributed to Zaleucus)” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd Edition, p. 616). The legislation of Zaleucus was known for its severity. Pindar refers to Locri as “the city where dwells Unswerving Strictness [*Atrekeia*]” (*Olympian* 10. 13).

³ Socrates uses a form of the verb *kosmein* (related to the noun *kosmos*) to convey the fact that he is dressed up. It is the first appearance of a *cosmos*-word in the dialogue. See Glossary under **cosmos**. The only other dialogue in which Socrates is uncharacteristically dressed up is the *Symposium*—he is wearing shoes (174A).

Hermocrates: To be sure, just as Timaeus here was saying, Socrates, we won't be lacking in heart, nor is there any pretext whatsoever on our part for not doing what you say; so that, even yesterday, from the very moment we left you and arrived back at the guest-room in Critias' house where we're staying—and earlier still as we were on the way—we in our turn were looking into these things. Then this fellow here related to us an account that comes from old hearsay; so now, Critias, tell *him* what you told us, so that he may join us in examining whether it's serviceable or unserviceable for the order we've been given.

Critias: That's what must be done—that is, if it also seems good to our third partner, Timaeus.

Timaeus: Why, of course, it seems good.

Critias: Hear, then, Socrates, an account most strange—and yet altogether true, as Solon, the wisest of the Seven, once claimed. Now Solon was a relative and really close friend of our great-grandfather Dropides—just as he himself often says in his poetry; and Dropides told our grandfather Critias, as the old man in turn related to us from memory, that great and wondrous were the old deeds of this city here, deeds that have disappeared as a result of time and the destruction of mankind; but one was the greatest of them all—a deed that would be fitting for us to remember now, so as to render our debt of thanks to you and at the same time to praise the goddess on her feast-day by singing, as it were, in a manner both just and true.⁴

Socrates: Well spoken. But now what sort of deed was this that Critias related, a deed not spoken of but genuinely enacted by this city in ancient times, according to the hearsay from Solon?

Critias: I shall proclaim it—having heard an old account from a man not young. For indeed, at the time, Critias, so he claimed, was already fairly close to ninety, while I was somewhere around ten; and it happened to

⁴ The feast to which Critias refers is probably the Greater Panathenaea, the celebration of Athena's birthday, which took place every four years. The main event was the adorning of the goddess's statue in the Acropolis with a colorful and elaborately woven *peplos* or robe. The robe depicted the Battle of the Gods and Giants and was conveyed to the Acropolis draped on the mast of a ship mounted on wheels. For more on the Panathenaea and Athenian festivals generally, see H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.

- be our day of Cureotis during the Apaturia.⁵ Now the children's part of the festival that was usually held on that occasion also took place at that time, and our fathers set up contests in the recitation of epic poetry. And so, while many poems by many poets were recited, since those of Solon were new at that time, many of us children chanted them. Then one of the members of our clan said—either because it really seemed so to him at the time or because he was also paying Critias a compliment—that
- C Solon, so it seemed to him, had come to be both the wisest of the Seven in other matters and what's more, in his poetry, the noblest of all poets.⁶ At that the old man was very pleased (how well I remember it!) and with a big smile said: "If only, Amynander, he hadn't misused his poetry by treating it as a side-job but pursued it seriously like the others, and if he had finished off the account he brought here from Egypt and wasn't compelled to neglect it because of the factions and all the other evils he discovered when he came back here, then, in my opinion at least, neither
- D Hesiod nor Homer nor any other poet would ever have become more highly reputed than he." "But what account was that, Critias?" said he. "Why," he declared, "it was about the greatest and most justly famous action this city ever enacted, although, through time and the destruction of those who performed it, its account didn't survive down to our day." "Say from the beginning," said he, "what Solon went on to say and how and from whom he heard these things held as true!"
- E "There is, in the Delta of Egypt," said he, "where, at its head, the stream of the Nile splits in two, a certain district called Saïtic,⁷ and the greatest city in this district is Sais (where in fact King Amasis also was from),⁸ whose originator is a certain goddess—the name in Egyptian is Neith, but in Greek (so their account goes) it is Athena; and these people claim to be great Athens-lovers and in some fashion relatives of the people here.
- "Now Solon said that when he had passed through there, he came
- 22A to be very much held in honor among them, and that once, furthermore, while putting questions about old things to the priests who were most

⁵ The Apaturia was held in October and came to be associated with the god Dionysus. The Cureotis took place on the third day of the festival, at which time the youths or *kouroi* were initiated into their clan. The word Apaturia derives from *phratría* or brotherhood but also suggests the Greek word for deception, *apatê*. See Parke, *ibid.* pp. 88-92.

⁶ "Noblest" here is *eleutheriôtaton*, literally, most free.

⁷ The word for district is *nomos*, which also means law, custom or song. See Glossary under **law**.

⁸ Herodotus tells us that "Amasis was a great lover of the Greeks" (*Inquiries* 2.172 ff.).

experienced in them, he discovered that neither he himself nor any other Greek hardly knew anything at all, so to speak, about such things. And once, when he wished to lead them on to give speeches about antiquities, he attempted to speak of the most ancient things of all in the accounts given here—about Phoroneus, said to be the first man, and about Niobe—
 B and he proceeded to tell stories about Deucalion and Pyrrha after the flood, and about how they survived it, and to give the genealogy of their descendants; and by recalling how many years it took for the events he was speaking about, he tried to number the periods of time.

“And one of the very oldest of the priests said: ‘Solon, Solon! You Greeks are always children, and there’s no such thing as an old Greek!’ Now when he heard this, Solon said: ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘You’re young,’ he declared, ‘young in soul, all of you; for in those souls
 C you don’t have a single old opinion derived from ancient hearsay or any study hoary with time. And the cause of this is the following. Many destructions of mankind in many ways have come to be and will be—the greatest by fire and water, but different and lesser ones by thousands of other means. For what is also told in your parts—that once Phaethon, son of Helios, yoked his father’s chariot and, through his not being able to drive it along his father’s path, burned up what was on the earth and
 D himself perished when he was struck by a thunderbolt—this is told in such a way that it has the figure of a story, but the truth of it is a shifting of the bodies that move around the earth and along the heavens, and the destruction that comes about on the earth by a great deal of fire at long stretches of time. At those times, then, all who dwell on mountains and in high and dry regions suffer a greater destruction than do those who dwell near the rivers and the sea; but for us, the Nile, our savior in other ways as well, at that time too saves us from this impasse by rising up. And when in turn gods purify the earth by flooding it with waters,
 E then those who live in the mountains—herdsmen and shepherds—are saved, while those who live in the cities near you are swept into the sea by the rivers. But along this place here, neither then nor at any other time does water stream down on the fields from above: on the contrary, it all tends by nature to come up from below. Hence, and on account of these causes, the things preserved here are said to be the oldest. The truth is that in all the regions where neither excessive cold nor heat is at work, there is always some class of human beings, sometimes more, sometimes less in number. And if anything beautiful or great or that also
 23A has something distinctive about it has come to pass somewhere, either near you or here or even in another region that we know by hearsay—all such things have been written down from olden times and preserved here in our temples. But it happens that at any given time your lands

and those of other people have only just been equipped with writing and all the things that cities need; and after the usual span of years, the heavenly stream comes back again like a plague to sweep your people away, and leaves only the illiterate and uneducated among you, so that all over again from the beginning, you become young, as it were, knowing nothing either of things here or of whatever was in your own land in olden times.

“At any rate, Solon, the genealogies you went through just now about the events in your land aren’t much different from children’s stories. First of all, you all remember only one flooding of the earth, whereas many have come to pass before this; and furthermore, you don’t know that the most beautiful and best race among men was born in the place where you live, from whose little bit of seed that was left over, there exists both you and the entire city that is now yours; but you’ve forgotten all this because for many generations the survivors met their end without giving voice to themselves in writing. For indeed, Solon, once, before the time of the greatest destruction by water, what is now the city of the Athenians was the best in war and was outstanding in all respects for her excellent laws. In her the most beautiful works are said to have been born as well as the most beautiful regimes of any of those under heaven that we’ve inherited through hearsay.’

“Having heard this, Solon said he was struck with wonder and put all his heart into begging the priests to recount for him, with precision and in order, everything about his fellow-citizens of old. And the priest said: ‘No grudge do I bear you, Solon; but on the contrary, for your sake I shall speak and for the sake of your city, and most of all for the sake of the goddess, who took as her lot both your city and this one here and brought them up and educated them—the city in your land first by the span of a thousand years, when she took over your seed from Gê and Hephaestus, and the one here at a later point. And the number of years for the arrangement here in our land, as it was written down in the sacred texts, is eight thousand. Now concerning the citizens born nine thousand years ago, I shall make plain to you in brief their laws as well as the most beautiful of deeds enacted by them; but the precise sequence of all this we’ll go through at another time at our leisure, once we’ve gotten hold of the writings themselves.

“As for their laws, take a look at the ones here; for you will discover, right here and now, many examples of the things that were once there in your land: first, the class of priests, which is bounded off as separate from the others; and after this, the class of craftsmen, of which each sort does its crafting all by itself without mixing with another; and then the class of shepherds, of hunters, and of those who till the earth. And, in par-

particular, regarding the warrior class, you've no doubt perceived that it has been separated off from all the other classes, and its members have been ordered by the law to care for nothing except what has to do with war. Moreover, there's the state of their armament—shields and swords—with which we were the first in Asia to be armed, the goddess having displayed this to us, just as she had first displayed it in those regions around you.

- C Again, when it comes to prudence, you no doubt see how much careful attention the law here has paid to the cosmos right from the beginning by having discovered all that accrues to human things from those that are divine, down to divination and medicine, which aims at health, and by having acquired all the other studies that follow them. Now at that time, the goddess, having arrayed you before all others with all this arrangement and order, settled you by singling out the region in which you were born, since she observed in it a good blending of seasons, one that would bear the most prudent men. So inasmuch as she's both a lover of war and a lover of wisdom,⁹ the goddess singled out this region as the one likely to bear men who most resembled her, and settled it first. And
- D you dwelled in the observance of such laws as these—indeed, laws that were still better—and you surpassed all mankind in every virtue, as was suitable for those who were the offspring and pupils of gods.

- E “Many and great are the deeds of your city that are written down here and that strike people with wonder, yet there is one that rises above them all in magnitude and virtue; for our writings tell of how great a power your city once stopped, which, in its insolence, was advancing against all of Europe together with Asia, having set out from somewhere far out in the Atlantic Ocean. For at that time the ocean there could be crossed, since an island was situated in front of the mouth that you people call, so you claim, the Pillars of Hercules.¹⁰ The island was bigger than Lybia and Asia together, and from it there was access to the other islands for those traveling at that time, and from the islands to the entire opposing continent that surrounds that true sea. For these parts around
- 25A here, which lie within the mouth we're talking about, are clearly a harbor that has a narrow entrance for sailing into, while that other is genuinely an ocean, and the land surrounding it would in perfect truth be most correctly called a continent. And on this very island of Atlantis there was gathered a great and wondrous power of kings, which mastered the entire island, many other islands, and even parts of the continent; and in addition to these, they further ruled over the lands here within
- B Lybia as far as Egypt, and over Europe as far as Tuscany.

⁹ The word for lover of wisdom here is *philosophos*, philosopher.

¹⁰ The strait of Gibraltar.

- C “ ‘Now once all this power had been gathered together into one, it undertook in a single onslaught to enslave the region around you and the one around us, and the entire region within the mouth. It was then, Solon, that the power of your city became illustrious to all mankind for her virtue and might, for she stood before all others in bravery and in all the arts relating to war, at times leading the Greeks, at times standing alone, of necessity, when the others defected; and having taken the most extreme risks and having mastered the invaders, she set up trophies;¹¹ and she prevented from being enslaved those who were not yet enslaved, while as for the rest of us who dwell within the boundaries of Hercules, she liberated us all ungrudgingly. But at a later time, when monstrous earthquakes and floods came about, and one grievous day and night assaulted them, then the entire assembly of warriors among you sank beneath the earth, and the island of Atlantis likewise sank beneath the sea and disappeared—which is why, even now, the ocean in that spot has become impassable and unexplorable, since it’s blocked by the shoal mud the island produced upon settling.’ ”
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- E You have heard, Socrates—in abridged version, so to speak—the very things uttered by old Critias in accordance with the hearsay from Solon; so when you spoke yesterday about the regime and the men you were describing, I was struck with wonder as I recollected the things I’m telling you now, since I realized that by some divine¹² quirk of chance, your speech wasn’t far off the mark from agreeing for the most part with what Solon said. Of course I didn’t want to speak up on the spur of the moment: so much time had passed that I didn’t remember it adequately. So I thought it would be expedient for me to speak up like this only after I had first recovered it all adequately for myself. That’s why I quickly agreed to what you ordered yesterday, since I considered that we’d be moderately well-provided for that which in all such matters is the greatest task: setting down as a foundation some account suited to our plans. Thus it was, just as this fellow here was saying, that the very moment I took off from here yesterday, I brought back the account for these men by recollecting it; and when I left them and went over it during the night, I recovered pretty much everything. Ah, yes, as the saying goes: “How wondrously memorable are the lessons of childhood!” For my part, I don’t know if I’d be able to recapture in memory all the things
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¹¹ A trophy (*tropaion*) consisted of pieces of armor that were taken from the enemy and hung on trees or displayed on upright posts. See Hermocrates’ reference to a trophy at *Critias* 108C.

¹² “Divine” here is *daimoniōs*, demonically. See 40D and note. It is highly interesting that Critias juxtaposes, and apparently identifies, the work of the divine and chance.

C I heard yesterday; but as for what I thoroughly heard a long, long time ago, I'd be utterly struck with wonder if any bit of it has escaped me. It certainly was all heard then with a great deal of pleasure and boyish delight, and the old man taught it to me heartily, since I kept asking him question after question, so that the account has become fixed in me like the burned-in markings of an indelible painting.¹³ What's more, right from the break of dawn I kept telling it to these fellows here so that they, along with me, would be well-provided with speeches.

D Now, then, to get to the very purpose for which all this has been said, I'm ready to speak, Socrates, not only on the chief points but also in all the particulars, just as I heard them; and as for the citizens and the city you went through for us yesterday as though in a story, we, having now carried them here into the truth, shall set down that city as being this very one I was talking about; and we shall declare that the citizens you had in mind are those true ancestors of ours about whom the priest was speaking. In all ways will they fit one another, and we will not sing out of tune in saying that they are the very ones who existed at that time. All of us in common, each taking his part, will attempt, to the best of our power, to render what's fitting for what you've ordered us to do. So

E then, Socrates, one must consider whether this account is to our mind, or whether one is to search further for another instead of it.

Socrates: And what account, Critias, might we get hold of instead of this one, which is especially fitting to the current sacrifices to the goddess because of its very close connection with her, and is no doubt of the utmost importance in being no fabricated story but a truthful account? How indeed, and from where, shall we discover other accounts if we dismiss these? No, it's not to be, but with Good Fortune to attend you, 27A you must speak; and I, in exchange for my speeches of yesterday, must keep my peace and listen in turn.

Critias: Then consider, Socrates, how we've managed the layout of your guest-gifts. It seemed good to us that Timaeus here—since he's the most astronomical of us and the one who's made it his main job to know about the nature of the all—should speak first, beginning from the birth of the cosmos and ending in the nature of mankind. I am to come after him, as though I had received from him the men born by his speech, and from you certain of them who had been educated in the highest degree.

¹³ The encaustic or "burned in" markings refer to a popular Greek method of painting that probably originated in Egypt: "it seems that coloured waxes were applied with a kind of palette-knife and fixed by heating with a metal rod. It may have been originally used for securing the colour on marbles meant to stand out of doors" (Martin Robertson, *A Shorter History of Greek Art*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 173).

- B Then, in accordance with that very word and law of Solon, I am to bring them before us, as before a court of judges, and make them citizens of this city of ours, on the grounds that they are indeed the Athenians of that former time, who, being hidden, were revealed by the oracular voice of the sacred texts, and, in what remains, to make speeches as though about men who are already citizens and Athenians.

Socrates: Perfect and brilliant too, it seems, is the feast of speeches I'm to get in return! So, Timaeus, it seems it would be your task to speak next—that is, after you've called upon gods in accordance with custom.

- C **Timaeus:** Why, Socrates, on that point at least, all men who partake of even a bit of sound-mindedness always call on a god, I suppose, at the onset of any affair be it small or great. And for us who somehow intend to make speeches about the all—telling in what way it was born, or even whether it was without birth—it's a necessity, unless we're utterly deranged, after we've called upon both gods and goddesses, to pray that all we say be to their mind above all and, following that, to our own. And
D let that be our invocation as it relates to gods; but we must also invoke what has to do with ourselves, so that all of you might most easily learn and I, for my part, most clearly display what I have in mind about the topics that lie before us.

- 28A Now then, in my opinion, one must first distinguish the following. What is it that always *is* and has no becoming; and what is it that comes to be and never *is*?¹⁴ Now the one is grasped by intellection accompanied by a rational account, since it's always in the same condition; but the other in its turn is opined by opinion accompanied by irrational sensation, since it comes to be and perishes and never genuinely *is*. Again, everything that comes to be, of necessity comes to be by some cause; for apart from a cause, it's impossible for anything to have a coming to be.

- B Now so long as the craftsman¹⁵ keeps looking to what's in a self-same condition, using some such thing as a model, and fashions its look and power, then of necessity everything brought to a finish in this way is beautiful; but if he should look to what has come to be, using a begotten model, the thing isn't beautiful. Now as for all the heaven (or cosmos, or whatever else it might be most receptive to being called, let it

¹⁴ Omitting the second *aei*, "always," that appears in Burnet's text. See John Whittaker, "*Timaeus* 27D 5ff.," *Phoenix* 23, 1969, pp. 181-185.

¹⁵ This is the first appearance in the dialogue of the famous demiurge or craftsman. He is introduced without fanfare and almost in passing.

be called that by us),¹⁶ the first thing about it one must investigate is the very thing set down at the beginning whenever one has to investigate anything: whether it always was, having no beginning of a coming to be, or whether it has come to be, having begun from some beginning. It has come to be; for it is visible and touchable and has body, and all such things are sensed; and things that are sensed, since they're grasped by opinion accompanied by sensation, came to light as coming to be and begotten. And again, for what comes to be, we claim that it's necessary that it come to be by some cause. Now to discover the poet and father of this all is quite a task, and even if one discovered him, to speak of him to all men is impossible. So one must go back again and investigate the following about the all: to which of the two models the builder looked when he fashioned it—to the one that's in a self-same condition and consistent, or to the one that has come to be. Now if this cosmos here is beautiful and its craftsman good, then it's plain that he was looking to the one that's everlasting, but if otherwise—which isn't even right for anyone to say—then to the one that has come to be. Now it's clear to everyone that it was to the everlasting; for the cosmos is the most beautiful of things born and its craftsman the best of causes. Since that's how it has come to be, then it has been crafted with reference to that which is grasped by reason and prudence and is in a self-same condition.

Again, starting from these things, there's every necessity that this cosmos here be the likeness of something. Now what is most important is to begin everything at a beginning that's in accordance with nature. So then, when it comes to a likeness and its model, one must determine how the accounts are also akin to those very things of which the accounts are interpreters. Now accounts of what's abiding and unshakable and manifest with the aid of intellect are themselves abiding and unchanging; and to the extent that it's possible and fitting for accounts to be irrefutable and invincible, they must not fall short of this. But as for accounts of something made as a likeness of something else—since it is a likeness—it is fitting that they, in proportion to their objects, be likenesses: just as Being is to Becoming, so is truth to trust. So then, Socrates, if, in saying many things on many topics concerning gods and the birth of the all, we become incapable of rendering speeches that are always and in all respects in agreement with themselves and drawn with precision, don't wonder. But if we provide likelihoods inferior to none,

¹⁶ The problem of choosing the right name for the all also comes up in the *Epinomis* (977B1-5). Both Timaeus and the Athenian stranger seem to be echoing Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 160-162: "Zeus—whoever he may be—if being invoked by this name is dear to him, let him be so invoked!"

one should be well-pleased with them, remembering that I who speak as well as you my judges have a human nature, so that it is fitting for us to receive the likely story about these things and not to search further for anything beyond it.

Socrates: Excellent, Timaeus! And it must be received entirely as you urge; so now that we've received your prelude so wonderfully, do for us what comes next in order and perform the song itself.¹⁷

Timaeus: Now let us say through what cause the constructor constructed
 E becoming and this all. Good was he, and in one who is good there never
 arises about anything whatsoever any grudge; and so, being free of this,
 he willed that all things should come to resemble himself as much as
 30A possible.¹⁸ That this above all is the lordliest principle of becoming and
 cosmos one must receive, and correctly so, from prudent men. For since
 he wanted all things to be good and, to the best of his power, nothing
 to be shoddy, the god thus took over all that was visible, and, since it
 did not keep its peace but moved unmusically¹⁹ and without order, he
 brought it into order from disorder, since he regarded the former to be in
 all ways better than the latter. And it was not right—nor is it right—for
 B him who is best to do anything except that which is most beautiful; so,
 once he did some calculating, he discovered that of all things visible by
 nature, nothing unintelligent will ever be a more beautiful work, com-
 paring wholes with wholes, than what has intellect; and again, that it's
 impossible for intellect apart from soul to become present in anything.
 Through this calculation, then, by constructing intellect within soul and
 soul within body, he joined together the all so that he had fashioned a

¹⁷ Socrates' word for the upcoming speech of Timaeus is neither *logos* (account) nor *mythos* (story) but *nomos*. In this context, the word can mean either law or song, just as *prooimion* can mean either preamble or prelude. "Perform the song" thus also means "Carry out the law." No doubt both meanings are intended. In the *Republic*, Socrates refers to "the song (*nomos*) that dialectic performs" (7. 532A).

¹⁸ The word for grudge here is *phthonos*, which refers to ill will and especially jealousy. The Egyptian priest in Critias' story had used the same expression, "no grudge" (23D); and ancient Athens was said to have liberated the lands besieged by the Atlantians *aphthonôs*, ungrudgingly (25C). In Herodotus the gods are, above all, grudging or jealous. In Book One of the *Inquiries*, Solon tells the tyrant Croesus that "the divine is altogether jealous and troublesome" (32). The sentiment, "The divine is jealous," appears in a letter written by King Amasis (3. 40), to whom Critias had referred at 21E. Aristotle rejects the jealousy of the divine early in the *Metaphysics* (1. 2 983A).

¹⁹ *plêmmelôs*, literally, in a way that was out of tune. Timaeus returns to a variant of this word at the end of his speech (92B). See Glossary under **musically**.

work that would be most beautiful and best in accordance with nature. So then, in this way, in keeping with the likely account, it must be said that this cosmos here in truth was born an animal having soul and intellect through the forethought of the god.

C

Again, with this beginning, we must say what comes next in order to these things: in similarity to which of the animals the constructor constructed it. Now we shall not count as worthy any of those that by nature have the form of part—for nothing that's like the incomplete would ever become beautiful—but let us set down the following about the cosmos. Among all animals, it's the one most similar to that of which the others, individually and according to kind, are parts. For that one, having embraced all the intelligible Animals, holds them within itself, just as this cosmos holds and embraces us and all the other nurslings constructed as visible.²⁰ For since the god wanted to make it as similar as possible to the most beautiful of things intellected and in all ways complete, he constructed it as an animal visible and one, holding within itself all those animals that are akin to it according to nature.

D

31A

So have we spoken correctly in naming the heaven “one,” or was it more correct to say that it's many and indefinite in number? One, if indeed it's been crafted in accordance with its model. For that which embraces all the intelligible Animals (however many they are) wouldn't ever be second in company with another one; for again there would have to be another animal surrounding them both, of which both of them would be a part, and then this cosmos would be more correctly spoken of as copied no longer from those two but from that other one which embraced them. So then, in order that this cosmos might be similar to the altogether perfect Animal in uniqueness, for this reason the maker did not make two or indefinitely many cosmoses; but rather this heaven here that's come to be, both is and will continue to be one—alone of its kind.

B

Now what has come to be must be bodily in form and both visible and touchable, but separated from fire nothing would ever become visible, nor would it become touchable without something solid, or solid without earth; hence, in beginning to construct the body of the all, the god proceeded to make it out of fire and earth. But it's not possible for two things alone to be beautifully combined apart from some third: some bond must get in the middle and bring them both together. And the most beautiful of these bonds is that which, as much as possible, makes itself and the things bound together one, and proportion is

C

²⁰ Timaeus does not expressly name *the* intelligible Animal that embraces the other intelligible Animals until 39E1. Is it a living thing or simply the form Animal, which embraces the four kinds of animality?

- 32A suited by nature to accomplish this most beautifully.²¹ For whenever, of three numbers, the middle term of any two of them, whether cubic or square, is such that as the first is to it so is it to the last—and again, conversely, as the last is to the middle so is this middle to the first—then the middle term becomes first and last, while the last and first in turn both become middle terms, so that of necessity it will turn out that all the terms will be the same; and once they’ve come to be the same in relation to each other, all will be one.²² Now if the body of the all had to become a plane having no depth at all, then one mean would have been enough to bind together its fellow terms and itself; but as the case now stands, since it was appropriate that it be solid in form, and since
B solids are joined together never through one mean but always through two, in this way, then, the god set water and air midway between both fire and earth.²³

And having fashioned among them the condition of same ratio as far as possible, so that fire was to air as air to water, and air was to water as water to earth, he bound together and constructed a heaven visible and touchable. For these reasons and out of such terms as these,
C four in number, the body of this cosmos was begotten to agree with itself through proportion, and from them came to have friendship, so that having come together with itself in self-sameness, it was born indissoluble by none other save him who bound it together.

- At this point the construction of the cosmos has taken up the whole of each one of the four terms. For the constructor constructed it from all of fire and water and air and earth, having left over no part or power of any of them outside, since he intended the following: first that it be
D as much as possible an animal whole and perfect, made up of perfect parts; and in addition to this, that it be *one*, inasmuch as there wasn’t anything left over, out of which another such animal might come to be;
33A and further that it be free of old age and disease, since he observed that

²¹ As Timaeus’ description makes clear, *analogia* here refers to a *mean* proportion.

²² The numbers 2, 4 and 8, for example, can be used to form the mean proportion 2:4::4:8 (where 4 is a square number and 8 a cubic number). When the two ratios that compose the proportion are inverted, the resulting proportion becomes 4:2::8:4 or 4:8::2:4. What was formerly the mean term is now at the extremes, and the terms that were formerly extremes are now in the middle. Euclid defines square and cubic numbers in *Elements* 7, Def. 18 and 19.

²³ Empedocles had posited four elements or, as he called them, *roots* of all things (fragment 6). For Timaeus, the elements start out as being rationally interrelated. Water and air are the two mediators between the more fundamental elements of fire and earth.

when hot and cold (and all things that have mighty powers) surround a composite body from the outside and attack it, they dissolve it in an untimely way and make it wither by bringing on disease and old age. Through this very cause and calculation he built it to be this one whole of all wholes taken together, perfect and free of old age and disease.²⁴

B And he gave it a figure that was fitting and akin to it. But for that animal that is to embrace within itself all animals, the fitting figure would be the one that has embraced all figures within itself, however many there are; so for this reason too, he worked it in circular fashion, sculpting it into the form of a sphere, the figure that keeps itself in all directions equidistant from its center to its extremities and which, of all figures, is the most perfect and most similar to itself, since he considered that

C *similar* is vastly more beautiful than *dissimilar*. So he made it all smooth on the outside and gave it a rounded finish, and this for many reasons. For of eyes it had no need at all, since nothing to be seen was left over on the outside; nor of hearing, since there was nothing to be heard; nor was there any atmosphere surrounding it that needed breathing; nor again was there need of any organ by which it might take food into itself or send it back out after it was digested. For nothing either went out from

D it nor went toward it from anywhere—since there *was* nothing—for the animal was artfully born so as to provide its own waste as food for itself and to suffer and do everything within itself and by itself, since he who put it together considered that the animal would be much better by being self-sufficient than in need of other things. And as for hands, which would be useless for either taking hold of or again warding off anything, he thought he didn't need to attach these to the animal in

34A vain, nor feet nor anything that on the whole served for standing on. The motion he did assign to it was the one congenial to its body, that motion among the seven kinds which especially attends intellect and prudence; so for this reason, he spun it around uniformly in the same spot and within itself and made it move by revolving in a circle, and he took away from it all the other six motions and fashioned it free from their various wanderings;²⁵ and since for this revolving motion the animal had no need of feet, he begat it legless and footless.²⁶

²⁴ Timaeus just falls short of declaring that the cosmic body is deathless.

²⁵ The six motions that are taken away are described at 43B. They correspond to the six directions in which a body can move in space. The seventh, privileged motion is rotation. For a very different (and more complex) delineation of motions, see *Laws* 10. 893Bff.

²⁶ The extended description of what the cosmic sphere lacks is indebted to two fragments by Empedocles (29 and 134). Timaeus suppresses what Empedocles makes explicit in both fragments: that the divine sphere lacks organs of reproduction.

B All this calculation of a god who always *is* concerning the god who was one day to be—once it had been calculated—made the animal smooth and even and equidistant from its center in every direction, a whole and perfect body made of perfect bodies. And after he put soul at its center, he stretched her throughout the whole, even to the point of covering the body on the outside with her as with a veil;²⁷ and so, as a circle turning in a circle, he established a heaven that was one, alone, solitary—able by itself, because of its excellence, to be company to itself and to stand in need of no other at all, and sufficient unto itself as acquaintance and friend. For all these very reasons, he begat it a happy god.

C As for the soul, although at present we are attempting to speak of her as though she came later, the god did not in fact contrive her as younger—for in uniting them, he would never have let an elder be ruled by a younger—but we who somehow partake largely of the accidental and random do so also when we speak.²⁸ He, however, constructed soul as prior to the body in both birth and excellence and as its elder, since she was to be mistress and ruler of body, and it was to be ruled.²⁹ And he did so out of the following materials and in the following mode.

35A Midway between the Being that is non-partitioned and always self-same, and in turn the Being that is partitioned and comes to be in the realm of bodies, he blended out of both a third form of Being; and doing the same thing with the nature of Same and the nature of Other, he constructed in the middle a blend of their non-partitioned form and the partitioned form that applies to bodies; and since they were three, he took hold of them and blended them into one entire look; and since the nature of the Other was loath to mix, he joined it to the Same with force. And once he had mixed them with Being and made one out of three, he again distributed this whole into so many portions as was fitting, each portion mixed from both Same and Other and from Being.³⁰

B

Here's how he began to make the division. First he took away one portion from all of what he had, and after this portion he proceeded to take away its double, and then in turn a third portion half as much again as the second and three times the first, and a fourth double the second,

²⁷ Earlier, intellect was in soul, and soul was in body (30B). Now body is somehow in soul.

²⁸ The word translated as “random” is *eikêi*. It is very close in appearance to the word *eikôs*, likely. See Glossary under **random**.

²⁹ The temporal priority of soul to body is also affirmed in the *Laws* (10. 892A-B).

³⁰ According to Cornford, soul here is a blend of the *intermediate* forms of Being, Same and Other—a blend of blends (pp. 59-61).

C and a fifth three times the third, and a sixth portion eight times the first,
 36A and a seventh twenty-seven times the first.³¹ After this he proceeded to
 fill up the double and triple intervals by cutting off still more portions
 from the original mixture; and he put them in the intermediate positions
 between the portions he already had, so as to have two means within
 each interval—a mean that exceeds one extreme and is exceeded by the
 other by the same *fractional part*, and another mean that exceeds one
 B other extreme by a *number* equal to the amount by which it is exceeded by the
 other extreme.³² And since there arose from these bonds new intervals
 within those he already had (intervals of 3:2, 4:3 and 9:8), he went about
 filling up all the 4:3 intervals with intervals of 9:8, leaving in each of
 them a fractional part. And this leftover interval that corresponded to
 the part had its terms in the numerical ratio of 256 to 243. And so, that
 in fact is how the mixture from which he'd been making these cuts at
 last had all been spent.³³

Then, once he had split this whole structure in two down its length
 and attached each strip to the other at their midpoints to make what
 resembled an X, he bent each of them into a circle, having clasped them
 together each to itself and to the other at a point directly opposite to
 C where they were first attached. And he took them around in the motion
 that goes round in the self-same way and in the same spot, and he pro-
 ceeded to make for himself one of the circles outer and the other inner.
 Then he designated the outer course to be of the nature of the Same,
 while the inner course to be of the nature of the Other. Now he led the
 course of the Same around sideways and to the right, and the course of
 the Other along the diagonal and to the left,³⁴ but mastery he gave to

³¹ The various portions here result from interspersing the terms of the propor-
 tions: 1:2::4:8 and 1:3::9:27. When expanded, each becomes a geometric
 proportion with two means: 1:2::2:4::4:8 and 1:3::3:9::9:27.

³² The first mean is the so-called harmonic mean; the second is the arithmetic
 mean. (See Appendix A.) They are further described in the *Epinomis* (991A-
 B) in the context of the Athenian stranger's praise of astronomy.

³³ In the preceding mathematical passage, Timaeus refrains from telling us
 the meaning of what the god is doing. The educated reader is expected to
 grasp, without being explicitly told, that the god is constructing the musical
 scale in Pythagorean tuning for four octaves and a major sixth. (The ratio
 256:243 roughly corresponds to our semitone.) See Appendix A.

³⁴ The circle of the Same is the celestial equator, and its (daily) motion is
 from east to west. It is the motion of the "fixed" stars—fixed, that is, with
 respect to the celestial sphere. The circle of the Other is the ecliptic. This
 is the great circle that includes the (annual) circuit of the Sun and governs
 the movement of the other planets. Its motion is from west to east. When
 both motions are combined, the resulting path for each "wandering" star
 within the all is a spiral (39B). See Appendix B.

- D the orbit of the Same and Similar; for it alone he let be unsplit, whereas the inner orbit he split in six places into seven unequal circles according to each interval of the double and triple—each of which were three. He ordered the circles to go in directions contrary to one another; and of the seven circles into which the inner circle had been split, he ordered that three be of the same speed, while the other four course at speeds dissimilar to one another and to those three, yet in ratio.³⁵

- E After this, when all the construction of the soul had become agreeable to the mind of her constructor, he proceeded to build within her all that was bodily in form, and he joined them with one another by bringing them together center to center; and once she had been woven in every direction from the center to the outermost heaven and had covered it in a circle from the outside as with a veil, she herself turned within herself and began a divine beginning of a life unceasing and thoughtful and for all time. And while heaven's body was born visible, soul herself was invisible and partook of calculation and attunement³⁶—she, the best of begotten things, born by the best of things intelligible and which *are* always.³⁷ And so, blended as she was from these three portions, from the nature of Same and Other and from Being, and divided into parts and then bound together according to ratio, herself circling back upon herself, whenever she touches on something that has its Being dispersed or, again, something whose Being is non-partitioned, she is moved throughout her whole self and tells what that thing is the same as and what it's other than, and in what exact relation and where and how and when it turns out that particular things *are* and are affected, both for what comes to be and for what's always in the same condition. The account that arises is similarly true whether it has to do with either the Other or the Same; and this is swept along within the self-moved without sound and noise. And whenever the account becomes concerned with what's sensed, and the circle of the Other, correct in its going, sends its message to all its soul, then opinions and beliefs arise which are firm and true; while in turn, whenever her account concerns what is rational, and the circle of
- 37A
- B

³⁵ "In ratio" here means "in a ratio of whole numbers." The seven circles form a cosmic seven-stringed lyre for Timaeus' soul music. The three celestial bodies that go at the same speed are the Sun, Venus and Mercury. The four that go at different speeds are the Moon, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The divine craftsman makes the paths before he makes the bodies that traverse them.

³⁶ The word for tuning or attunement is *harmonia*. See Glossary under **tuning**.

³⁷ Contrast *Phaedrus* 245C-E, where Socrates argues that soul is "of necessity both unborn and deathless."

- C the Same, wheeling smoothly, makes its disclosure, then intellection and knowledge are of necessity brought to perfection. But if anyone should ever say that these two conditions come about in any of the beings other than soul, he'll be speaking anything rather than the truth.

- D And when the father who begat it noticed that it was moved and living—a sanctuary born for the everlasting gods³⁸—he rejoiced in it and, being well-pleased, thought of fashioning it to be still more similar to its model. And just as the model happens to be an everlasting Animal, so too did he attempt as far as possible to bring this all to a similar perfection.

- E Now to be sure, the nature of the Animal happened to be eternal, and in fact it was just this feature that it wasn't possible to attach perfectly to that which is begotten; so he proceeded to think of making a certain moving likeness of eternity; and just as he's putting heaven in array, he makes of eternity, which abides in unity, an eternal likeness that goes according to number, that very thing we have named *time*.³⁹ For since there were no days and nights and months and years before heaven was born, he contrives their birth to come about just when heaven was constructed. All these are parts of time, and "was" and "will be" are forms of time that have come to be—exactly those forms which, without noticing it, we incorrectly apply to everlasting Being. For this is just what we say—"it was," and "it is" and "it will be." But "is" alone is suited to it, in keeping with the true account, whereas "was" and "will be" are fittingly said of becoming, which goes on in time—for both are motions, but it isn't suitable for that which is always in the same unmoving condition
- 38A

³⁸ "Sanctuary" here is *agalma*, which can also refer to a statue or an offering to a god. Cornford, following Proclus, takes the word as referring to a shrine for the gods (pp. 99-102). Timaeus is playing on the similarity between *agalma* as a thing of joy (from *agallein*, to glory or delight in) and *agasthai*, to marvel at, admire, take delight in. The word *agalma* occurs only once in the *Timaeus* but several times in the *Critias* (for example, 110B5, 116D7 and 116E4). See *Epinomis* 984A-B, where the Athenian stranger uses *agalmata* and *eikones* (likenesses) interchangeably in reference to the heavenly bodies.

³⁹ As Cornford observes, time for Timaeus is "not a pre-existing framework" (not a kind) but a feature of the cosmic order (p. 102). It is not on a par with Space, which exists "before" the birth of the all (52B). Although Timaeus seems to suggest an important distinction between the everlasting or perpetual (*aidios*) and the eternal or timeless (*aiônios*), both terms are used of the intelligible model. In the oft-quoted definition of time, it seems strange to hear that the likeness is eternal (*aiônios*). To avoid this apparent confusion of the sensed likeness with its intellected model, Remi Brague has suggested that the adjective go with "number" rather than with "time" (for a discussion of this point, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999], pp. 81-82).

to be in the process of becoming either older or younger through time, nor suitable that it ever became so, nor that it has become so now, nor that it will be so hereafter, nor on the whole are any of those conditions suitable which becoming has attached to what's swept along in the realm of sense; on the contrary, these were born as forms of time, which imitates eternity and circles around according to number—and there are further expressions besides the ones we mentioned: “what has become *is* become,” and “what is becoming *is* becoming,” and in addition, “what's about to become *is* about to become,” and “what is not *is* not”—none of which we say with precision. But the present would probably not be a fitting occasion for a precise reasoning-out of these matters.

Time, then, has come into being along with heaven, in order that, having been begotten together, they might also be dissolved together—should some dissolution of them ever arise; and it was made in accordance with the model of the eternally enduring nature, in order that it might be as similar as possible to its model. For whereas that model is something that *is* for all eternity, heaven in its turn is something that has become and *is* and *will be*, through the end, for all time. So, on the basis of such reason and such thought on god's part for the birth of time, in order that time be begotten, the Sun and Moon and the five other stars (which have been given the name “wanderers”⁴⁰) have been born for the marking off and guarding of the numbers of time. And once the god had made bodies for each of them, he set them in the orbits in which the circuit of the Other was moving—seven they were, since the stars were seven: the Moon in the first circuit around the earth, the Sun in the second above the earth, the Dawnbearer and the star called “Sacred to Hermes” in those circuits going in a circle at a speed equal to that of the Sun but allotted the power contrary to him;⁴¹ whence the Sun and the Star of Hermes and the Dawnbearer overtake and in the same way are overtaken by one another.⁴² As for the others—where and for just what causes he settled them, if someone should go through all this in detail, the account that's a side-job here would provide more work than that for the sake of which it's being given. Maybe later, when there's leisure for it, these matters might happen to meet with an exposition worthy of them.

⁴⁰ The wanderers are *planêta* or planets—from the verb *planasthai*, to wander.

⁴¹ On the much-disputed “contrary power” see Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928, pp. 196–202, and D. R. Dicks, *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970, pp. 123–129.

⁴² The Dawnbearer or Morning Star is Venus; the star that is Sacred to Hermes is Mercury. The overtaking and being overtaken refer to the fact that, unlike the outer planets (Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), Mercury and Venus always appear somewhere within a fixed angular distance on either side of the Sun.

And so, when each body (as many of them as were needed for the fashioning of time) had attained the course that was fitting for itself, and when they had been begotten as animals bound with ensouled bonds and had learned what was ordered them, they went around according to that course of Other, which is slanted and goes through the course of the Same and is mastered by it—this one among them going in a greater circle, that one going in a lesser, those in the lesser circle going around more swiftly, while those in the greater more slowly. Now because of the course of the Same, the ones that go around most swiftly kept appearing to be overtaken by those that go slower, although they really do the overtaking; for the course of the Same (which is the swiftest) twisted all their circles into a spiral (because they proceed in two ways that are contrary and simultaneous), and it made the body most slowly going away from itself appear the nearest to it. And in order that there be some manifest measure of their relative slowness and swiftness, with which⁴³ they advanced in their eight courses, a light did the god touch off in that circuit second from the Earth—the very light we have now called the Sun—in order that this might shine forth as much as possible to all things everywhere, and that those animals for whom it was appropriate might partake of number by having learned it from the orbit of the Same and Similar. So then, Night and Day have been born in this way and for these reasons, being the circuit of the one and most prudent circling; and Month whenever the Moon, having come around her own circle, overtakes the Sun; and Year, whenever the Sun comes around on his own circle. As for the other stars, humans have not taken note of their circuits (except for a few out of the many), nor do they give them names, nor take exact relative measurements and look at them by means of numbers, so that people scarcely know at all that the “wanderings” of these bodies—baffling in their multitude yet wondrously embroidered—are time. It is nonetheless possible to note that the perfect number of time would fulfil the Perfect Year at that moment when the relative speeds of all the eight circuits, having finished together, come to a head, as measured by the circle of the Same and Similarly-moving. In accordance with these very reasons and for the sake of all this were all those stars begotten that have turnings as they make their way through heaven,⁴⁴ in order that this animal might be as similar as possible to the perfect and intelligible Animal in the imitation of its eternally enduring nature.

⁴³ Reading *kath' ha* (literally, according to which) with Archer-Hind.

⁴⁴ The turnings here are not rotations but changes in direction. See Taylor, p. 220 and Appendix B.

Now in other respects it had, up to the birth of time, already been fashioned in similarity with that to which it was likened; but since it had not yet embraced the entire range of animals born within itself, it was still for this reason in a dissimilar condition. Accordingly, this remaining part he proceeded to fashion by imprinting it with the nature of its model. So just as intellect sees looks of whatever sorts and however many that are in the Animal that *is*, those sorts and that many he thought this animal too must have. Now the forms of these looks are four: one the heavenly kind to which gods belong, another the winged and airborne kind, a third the water-dwelling form, and the form that's footed and land-living fourth. So then, most of the look of the divine form he went about fashioning out of fire, so that it would be as brilliant and beautiful to look at as possible; and likening it to the all, he went about making it well-rounded. And he proceeds to set it in the prudence of the most masterful to follow along in its train, having distributed it all around the whole heaven in a circle to be for it a true adornment, cunningly embroidered over the whole.⁴⁵ Two motions he attached to each member of this form: one the motion that's self-same and goes around in the same spot, since each in itself always thinks the same thoughts about the same things, the other the motion that goes forward, since it's mastered by the orbit of the Same and Similar. But with respect to the five other motions, each of them is unmoved and standing, in order that they might become as excellent as possible. Now from this cause were born those among the stars that were unwandering—animals that are divine and everlasting and abide always by revolving in a self-same way and in the same spot; and as for those stars that turn and have that sort of wandering, they were born in just the way described at an earlier point. And Earth he contrived to be both our nurturer and, because she's huddled round the pole that's stretched through all, the guardian and craftsman of Night and Day⁴⁶—first and eldest of the gods who have come to be within heaven.

⁴⁵ The word for adornment here is *kosmos*, which means both the cosmos and any ornament or beautiful arrangement (see Glossary under **cosmos**).

⁴⁶ The question of whether or not the Earth moves according to Timaeus has been debated since antiquity. The controversy revolves around the phrase *heillomenên ... peri ton dia pantos polon tetamenon*, "huddled round the pole that's stretched through all." Burnet (following Aristotle, who cites this phrase in *On the Heavens* 2.13.293b30) reads the participle *illomenên* for *heillomenên*. *Illomenên* means winding and thus implies that the Earth moves, while *heillomenên* means pressed or crowded together, and implies that it does not. Cornford argues for *illomenên* and a rotating Earth (pp. 120–134). Against Cornford, D. R. Dicks argues that *heillomenên* is the correct reading and that the Earth guards the alternation of Night and Day by

D But as for the choric dances of these stars and their juxtapositions with one another, and the return-motions of their circles back upon themselves and their progressions, and which among the gods come to be in conjunction with one another and how many of them in opposition, and how they pass behind and in front of each other and at what times each of these is hidden from our view and, upon reappearing, sends terrors and portents of things to come afterwards upon men unable to calculate—to speak of all this without looking at imitations of these very things would be vain labor.⁴⁷ But let this and the way we've put it about the nature of gods visible and begotten be sufficient, and let it have an end.

E As for the other divinities,⁴⁸ to declare and come to know their birth is beyond our power, and one must be persuaded by those who have declared it in earlier times since they were offspring of gods (so they claimed), and presumably they, if anyone, had sure knowledge of their own ancestors. It's impossible, then, to distrust sons of gods, even if they do speak without either likelihoods or necessary demonstrations; but since they profess to be reporting family matters, we must follow custom and trust them. And so, in keeping with what they say, let the birth of these gods so hold and be declared. Of Gê and Ouranos were born the children Okeanos and Tethys; and of these were born Phorkys, Kronos and Rhea, and all those that go with them; and of Kronos and Rhea were born Zeus, Hera, and all those who, as we know, are called their siblings; and of these again were born still other offspring.

41A

Now when all the gods had their birth—both those who make their rounds in an always apparent way and those who appear to the extent that they're willing—the begetter of this all proceeds to speak to them as follows:

resisting the motion of the Same (pp. 132-137 and note 181 on p. 239). See Archer-Hind's note in *The Timaeus of Plato*, New York: Arno Press, 1973, pp. 132-134. A brief summary of the controversy appears in Guthrie's note to his translation of *On the Heavens* in the Loeb edition (pp. 220-223). Forms of the disputed word *heillomenên* occur elsewhere in the dialogue (76C1 and 86E7-A1). For the reasons given by Archer-Hind, Cornford and Dicks, I have omitted the *tên* from the sentence in Burnet's text.

⁴⁷ Reading *autôn* for the *âu tôn* in Burnet's text. The *mimēmata* or imitations here are the physical, mechanical models used by ancient astronomers to reproduce, and thereby understand, celestial phenomena.

⁴⁸ The divinities are in Greek *daimones*. A *daimôn* can be the good spirit that guides (90A) or an evil spirit—a demon.

- B “Gods of gods,⁴⁹ you works of whom I am both craftsman and father, born through me and indissoluble—unless, that is, I myself were willing to dissolve you! Now, to be sure, all that is bound together can be dissolved, and yet only one who is bad would be willing to dissolve that which is beautifully joined together and in good condition. For these reasons, and since indeed you have been born, you are not immortal nor entirely indissoluble, yet in no way shall you suffer this very dissolution, nor shall you happen to meet with the doom of death, since through my will have you been allotted a bond greater still and more lordly than those bonds with which you, when born, were bound together. So now, learn what I present before you in speech. Three mortal kinds are left
- C unbegotten still; but if these are not born, heaven shall be imperfect, for it shall not have all the kinds of animals within itself—but have them it must, if it is to be sufficiently perfect. And if through me these kinds
- D did come to be and partake of life, they would be made equal to gods. So in order that mortal kinds may *be* and this all be genuinely all, do you turn yourselves, in accordance with nature, to the crafting of animals, imitating my power in giving you birth. And as many of them for whom it is suitable to have the same name, ‘immortal,’ the part called divine and which has authority within those always willing to follow the just way and yourselves—that part shall I hand down to you after I’ve sown it and made a beginning. But as for the part that remains, do you, by interweaving mortal with immortal, go about fashioning and begetting animals; and make them grow by giving them nourishment, and, when they’ve withered away, receive them back unto yourselves!”

Thus he spoke, and once again into the former bowl⁵⁰ in which he had blended and mixed the soul of the all he proceeded to pour what was left over from the previous ingredients,⁵¹ mixing it in somewhat the same mode, yet unblended no longer to the same extent but rather in

⁴⁹ Cornford departs from Burnet's reading of *theoi theôn* (“gods of gods”) by interposing a comma, even though there is no dispute over the MS. He does so on the grounds that *theoi theôn* has no discernible meaning (p. 369). But a very simple meaning presents itself if the genitive *theôn* is taken as partitive. Having gathered together both types of gods in one group, the craftsman immediately separates the wheat from the chaff, the legitimate heirs from the usurpers of the title. The gods whom the divine craftsman chooses to address are not the deceptive Olympians but his own well-behaved offspring. These are the true gods among the gods, the *theoi theôn*.

⁵⁰ The *kratêr* is a bowl in which wine is mixed with water.

⁵¹ As Taylor points out, the human soul-mixture is not made out of a residue of the divine soul-mixture but out of the original ingredients of Being, Same and Other. He draws the important conclusion that “our souls are neither ‘parts’ of the cosmic soul nor ‘emanations’ from it” (p. 255).

E second and third degree of purity. And when he had combined all of it, he divided it up into souls equal in number to the stars and assigned each soul to each star; and having mounted them, as it were, in a chariot, he showed them the nature of the all. He told them the laws of destiny: how
 42A the first birth ordered for all would be one, in order that no one might be slighted by him; and how, once he had sown them, each in his own appropriate organ of time, they would have to sprout into the most god-fearing of animals; and how, human nature being twofold, the superior part would be a kind which at a later point would be called Man.⁵²

Now when, by necessity, they should be implanted in bodies and made subject to whatever might come into and go out of their body, here's what would necessarily happen. First, there would be sensation, one and the same for all of them and innate, arising from forceful affections; and second, erotic love mixed with pleasure and pain; and in
 B addition to these, terror and anger and whatever goes along with them and all such things that by nature tend to be contrary and set at odds with each other. If they were to master these, they would live in justice, but if they were mastered by them, then in injustice. And he who has lived well throughout his appropriate time would make his way back to the dwelling of his lawful star and would have a life that was happy and habitual to him. But he who had failed to live well would, in his second
 C birth, take on woman's nature.⁵³ If in that form he still did not refrain from evil, then in whatever mode he might make himself bad, he would always take on some such bestial nature in the similitude of that mode of life that was born in him. And he would keep changing and would not cease from his labors until he had reached the following point: not before he should draw along with the circuit of the Same and Similar that was in himself the vast mob of fire and water and air and earth that
 D had later grown over it and, having mastered by reason that roaring and irrational mob, reach the form of his first and best condition.

After he had laid all these strictures on them, in order that he might be blameless of the future evil from each of them,⁵⁴ he went about sowing some in the Earth, some in the Moon, some in all the other organs of time. And after this sowing, he handed down to the young gods the task of molding mortal bodies, and—once they had fashioned

⁵² The Greek word here is not *anthrôpos* (human being) but *anêr*, which refers to man in his maleness, man as opposed to woman, and also to a true or "real" man.

⁵³ As Leo Strauss observes, man for Timaeus starts out as a "sexless male" (*The City and Man* [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964], p. 111, note 42).

⁵⁴ An echo of the myth of Er in *Republic* 10: *aitia helomenou, theos anaitios*, "The blame is the chooser's, god is blameless" (617E).

- E whatever was left over of human soul that still had to be added, along with all that this entailed—of ruling and steering the mortal animal in the most beautiful and best way as far as they were able, except in so far as it itself might become a cause of evils for itself.

And as for him, having ordered all these very things, he proceeded to abide in his own proper and habitual state, while his sons, mindful of their father's order, proceeded to obey it. Having taken the immortal principle of the mortal animal, imitating their own craftsman, they borrowed from the cosmos portions of fire and earth and water and air, as though intending to pay them back again, and went about gluing together the portions thus taken into the same thing, not with the indissoluble bonds with which they themselves were held together, no, but welding them with close-packed rivets invisible for their smallness; and fashioning one individual body out of all the portions, they bound the circuits of the immortal soul within a body subject to inflow and outflow.

- 43A And these circuits, as though bound within a prodigious river, neither mastered it nor were mastered, but were forcibly swept along and also did sweep, so that the whole animal was moved—moved, however, in whatever disorderly way it might happen to progress, and irrationally since it had all six motions: it went forwards and backwards, and again to the right and to the left, both down and up, wandering every which way down all six regions.⁵⁵ For as prodigious as was that food-supplying wave that washed over it and then flowed away, still greater was the uproar that the affections of the bodies produced by attacking each of them whenever a body of one of them would collide with fire, having met up with it as something alien from the outside, or also with a solid chunk of earth or with the liquid glidings of waters, or when it would be overtaken by a blast of wind-swept air, and when the motions swept through the body by all these properties would attack the soul—which is also the very reason why all these motions were then called “sensings” and are still called that now.⁵⁶

- C And what's more, since these sensings were then bringing about the most widespread and greatest commotion then and under those circumstances, moving along with the constantly flowing channel of nutriment and severely shaking up the circuits of the soul, they completely hindered the circuit of the Same by flowing contrary to it, and kept it from ruling and going, while the circuit of the Other in turn they
- D

⁵⁵ The regions corresponding to the six spatial directions just mentioned: up and down, backwards and forwards, left and right.

⁵⁶ Timaeus playfully derives the word for sensing (*aisthêsis*) from the word for darting or rushing (*aïssein*).

thoroughly shook up so as to twist into all sorts of contortions the three several intervals of the double and triple, as well as in the mean terms and linking bonds of 3:2, 4:3 and 9:8, since these were not completely dissoluble, except by him who had bound them together,⁵⁷ and so as to make all sorts of fractures and disruptions in the circles in as many ways as possible, so that, barely holding together with each other, although they coursed along, they coursed irrationally: now in reverse, now sideways, now upside down. It was as when someone in an upside-down position planted his head on the ground and held his feet above him by pushing them against something; then, given this affection for both the man affected in this way and the people watching him, rights and lefts show themselves as reversed, each party in relation to the other.⁵⁸ Now since the orbits suffer with severity this same thing and others like it, whenever they happen to be around something from outside, either from the kind Same or from the kind Other, at that time, by addressing them as “same as” and “other than” what’s in fact contrary to their truth, they’ve become false and unintelligent, and there’s not a single circuit among them at that time that either rules or leads. But if certain sensations from the outside, by sweeping along and colliding with these circuits, also draw along with them the entire vessel of the soul, then these circuits seem to master but in fact are mastered.

And so, precisely because of all these affections, both now and in the beginning, soul first becomes unintelligent whenever she’s bound within a mortal body. But whenever the stream of increase and nutriment comes upon her to a lesser extent, and the circuits, recovering their calm once again, go their own way and are settled down more as time goes by, then from that point on the orbits are set straight with respect to the figure of each of the circles that go according to nature: they address the Other and the Same correctly, and they set the man who has them on his way to becoming thoughtful. And so, if some cor-

⁵⁷ The double and triple intervals are the two geometric progressions used to generate the soul music at 35B. They are 1:2::2:4::4:8 and 1:3::3:9::9:27. 3:2, 4:3 and 9:8 are, respectively, the perfect fifth, perfect fourth and *tonos* or whole tone. See Appendix A.

⁵⁸ The Inverted Man is one of many comic moments in the likely story. If I am right side up and you are looking at me, then my left faces your right: we both know that we are mirror images of one another and so correctly identify each other’s left and right. But if I am upside down, and neither of us is thinking of the consequences of inversion, we become disoriented with respect to each other’s left and right: we use our former principle (“your rights and lefts oppose my lefts and rights”) where it no longer applies and so wrongly identify each other’s rights and lefts. See Taylor’s explanation of the joke (p. 271). Compare what Timaeus says about mirroring at 46A-C.

- rect upbringing assists in education, the man becomes perfectly sound and healthy, having escaped the greatest disease;⁵⁹ but if he was careless in this matter, then, after making his way through a lame living of his lifetime, he comes back to Hades imperfect and unintelligent. These things, however, come about at a later time. But as for what now lies before us, we must go through it with more precision; and as for what came before *that*—everything about the birth of bodies in all their parts and about soul, and the causes and forethought of gods through which soul was born—we must hold on tight to what’s most likely and, thus traveling along, go through that too accordingly.

- Now the divine circuits, which were two, they bound within a spheriform body, thus imitating the figure of the all, which was rounded—the body to which we now give the name “head,” which is most divine and dominates all the parts within us. To it the gods also handed over all the body, which they had assembled to be its servant, since they noticed that it would partake of all the motions that were to be. So in order that it not go rolling along on the ground, which has all manner of heights and depths, and be at an impasse when it came to climbing over the one and climbing out of the other, they gave to it the body as a chariot for easy travel, which is exactly why the body acquired length and sprouted four limbs extendable and flexible, since god contrived them as a means of travel, so that by means of these limbs the body, by grasping and being supported, has become capable of traveling through all regions, bearing on high the dwelling of our most divine and most sacred part.⁶⁰ In this way, then, and for these reasons, legs and hands sprouted on all of us, and since the gods considered the front more worthy of honor than the back and more fit for ruling, in this direction did they give us most of our traveling. Now it was necessary that a human have the front of his body distinct and dissimilar. That’s why they first set down the face on that side, around the vessel of the head, and bound within it organs for all the forethought of the soul; and they ordained that this natural front be that which partakes of guidance.

And of the organs they first built light-bearing eyes, having bound them in the face by the following cause. All the fire that wasn’t able to burn but provides gentle light they contrived to become a body kindred to

⁵⁹ At 88B Timaeus says that the greatest of diseases is *amathia*, stupidity.

⁶⁰ The verb used to describe the head’s quandary is from *aporein*, to be perplexed in the sense of not having a way or *poros*. It is hilarious to think of the bodiless head as actually rolling around, perplexed about how it is to make its way in the world. The body gives the head its proper dignity as well as its means of transport. It is a sort of moving pedestal.

each day.⁶¹ For the unalloyed fire within us, which is brother to this, they made flow smooth and dense through the eyes, having compressed the whole eye but especially the central part, so as to fend off all such other fire as was coarser, while letting filter through only such fire that was itself pure.⁶² So whenever the light of open day is all around the stream of vision, then, rushing out like to like and having become compounded with the fire of day, that stream composes with it one kindred body along the eyes' direct line of sight, wherever the stream that rushes forth from inside pushes against any of the objects outside that collide with it. Now as for the entire stream of vision, once it has become similarly affected through its similarity to the outer fire of day, whatever it itself touches at any time or whatever other thing it's touched by, it spreads the motions of these things throughout the entire body until they reach the soul and thus produces that very sensation by which we say that we see. But when the fire that's akin goes off into night, then the stream of vision is cut off; for in going out into the dissimilar, it is itself altered and is utterly quenched, no longer becoming one in nature with the neighboring air, inasmuch as this air doesn't have any fire. So it stops seeing and, what's more, becomes an invitation to sleep, since the gods contrived the nature of the eyelids as a safeguard for vision. Whenever they're closed, they shut in the power of the inner fire, and this power disperses and tempers the inner motions; and when these motions are tempered, peace comes about; and when this peace becomes great, then an all but dreamless sleep comes over us. But if some fairly great motions are left behind, then, depending on what sort they are and in what regions they're left, they produce phantasms of that sort and to that extent, which are copied inside and remembered as outside by those who have awakened.

As for the image-making of mirrors and anything else shiny and smooth, it's no longer difficult at all to observe what happens. For from the communion of the inner and the outer fire, each with the other, and again at that moment when a single fire arises at the smooth surface and is remodeled in various ways, all such images of necessity appear in it—the fire of the reflected face having become compounded with the fire of the vision at the smooth and brilliant surface. And lefts show themselves as right, because contact comes about for contrary parts of the vision with contrary parts of the reflected object, against the established habit of collision, while contrariwise, rights show themselves as right and lefts as left whenever the light, being compounded with that

⁶¹ Timaeus is playing on the similarity between *hêmeros* (gentle) and *hêmera* (day).

⁶² Here, as elsewhere in his speech, Timaeus follows Empedocles and his doctrine of effluences.